

Promised Land(s)?:
Ethnicity, Cultural Identity, and Transnational Migration
among Japanese Brazilian Workers in Japan

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約束の地？—日本における日系ブラジル人労働者のエスニシティ、
文化的アイデンティティ、トランスナショナルな移動—

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移住は通常、「約束の地」、すなわち新しい生活を始めることを可能とする夢の「場所」と結びつく。しかし、グローバリゼーションやトランスナショナリズムが拡大した21世紀、この通念は再考を迫られている。本論文は、トランスナショナルな移住者が直面する文化およびエスニックなアイデンティティの問題を、日本に住む日系ブラジル人の事例を通して検討する。

日系ブラジル人の日本への移住は、入管法が改正された1990年以降に特に増加した。ところが「約束の地」であるはずの日本で、彼らは言語、エスニック及び文化的アイデンティティの面で日本社会との摩擦に直面した。「内/外」という境界概念に基づく日本の社会構造も、日系ブラジル人の日本社会との関わりを困難にしている要因の一つである。

また、日本で生まれ育った日系ブラジル人2世は、祖国(home)と「約束の地」の狭間で、アイデンティティのジレンマを抱える。彼らにとっては、祖国も、「約束の地」も一つではない。こうした分析から、「約束の地」とは、いまや地理的な場所ではなく、希望をもつ心理状態、その姿勢、感覚であると結論づけられる。

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2008 while Japanese Brazilians were celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Japanese migration, the economic system began to face a world-wide crisis. The implications of that economic crisis are multiple for both Japan and the Japanese Brazilian migrants, who are increasingly facing unemployment. For many, returning to Brazil is the logical solution, which in consequence seems to reverse the flow of migration back to South America. This seems to mark the end of a collective dream. Migrations always entitle a sense of “promised land(s)”, the dream of a “place” where one can build a new life, even if just temporarily. In the 21st century, however, globalization and transnationalism are increasingly challenging this notion.

This article examines issues of cultural and ethnic identity that transnational migrants face. It focuses on the particular situation of Japanese Brazilian migrants in Japan. The

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reverse of the migration pattern from Japan to Brazil in 2008 may imply deep consequences for the second generation born and raised in Japan, especially affecting their possibilities for social, linguistic and cultural incorporation into Brazilian society. In order to investigate this, the first section of this article will expand on the notion of “promised land(s)” through the experiences of both Japanese in Brazil and Japanese Brazilians in Japan. The second section will “unpack” situations related to culture, language, and ethnicity in order to show the issues that Japanese Brazilian migrants and their families have experienced while in Japan. The last section will focus on a reconsideration of the notions of “home” and “promised land(s).”

II. ON PROMISED LAND(S)

The Hebrew Bible narrates the story of Abraham and his wife Sarah, who migrated from Ur of the Chaldeans to Canaan in search of the “promised land” (Gn 11:31-25:8).¹ In the Western world's imaginary this story has been re-read as the guidance principle for multiple peoples searching for a place where they could settle and make a better life than the one left behind. The notion of the “promised land” is, for example, at the root of the “American dream”, which inspired generations of migrants to venture to the United States.²

Whenever a migratory pattern has occurred, it has conveyed hope for a better situation. This was the case of the 781 migrants who arrived at the port of Santos aboard the *Kasato Maru* in 1908, inaugurating the Japanese migration to Brazil. This migration wave began during years of profound political, social and economic changes in Japan. For the first migrants and the thousands who followed them, Brazil was a “promised land”, a place where they could work hard, save money and return to their homeland and lead a more prosperous life. In reality, many of the migrants never returned to Japan, ending their days in their adopted country: Brazil. There were various reasons for this, especially the plantation system. Japanese migrants suffered labor and financial problems, as they were trapped within an intricate plantation system with power dynamics that did not always benefitted them. For example, the migrants received a salary that was not enough for them to save. Slowly, more and more workers made their way out of the plantation to the factories, seeking better salaries and working conditions. Others established colonies where they dedicated to agriculture. Their history shows different events that deeply affected the formation of a Japanese Brazilian community in many cities and rural areas of Brazil. Along with other immigrants, they worked hard and many of them were able to live prosper and meaningful lives. The post-WW II period was the moment in which Japanese changed their goal of returning to Japan and decided to permanently settle in Brazil. Their descendants were born in that new land, and Brazil's customs, language, and traditions became theirs in the process of socialization.

In the early 1990s, *push-pull* factors changed that history with the beginning of the migration of Japanese Brazilians to Japan as temporary workers. In Japan, the increasing demands for cheap labor for small and medium size factories as a result of the economic boom in the late 1980s combined with the low birth-rate of population growth constituted the *pull* factors. In Brazil, the consequences of the military dictatorship from 1964-1985, the constant crisis of the Brazilian market, and the impoverishment of the middle class due to failed economic plans constituted the *push* factors. Therefore, middle and upper-middle class Japanese Brazilians began to search for other places in order to find the economic resources to prevent them from sinking into poverty.

The Japanese government reformed the *Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act* (hereinafter Immigration Law) in 1990. While that reform sharply reduced the flow of migrants from Southeast Asia and the Middle-East, it also facilitated the migration of Japanese descendants (*Nikkeijin*) on the grounds of ethnicity. An article published in the monthly magazine of the Liberal Democratic Party pictures an interesting perception about this:

Admitting *Nikkeijin* legally will greatly help to ameliorate the present acute labor shortage. People who oppose the admission of the unskilled are afraid of racial discrimination against foreigners. Indeed, if Japan admitted many Asians with different cultures and customs than those of Japanese, Japan's homogeneous ethnic composition could collapse. However, if *Nikkeijin* were admitted, this would not be a problem... *Nikkeijin*, as relatives of the Japanese, would be able to assimilate into Japanese society regardless of nationality and language.³

This perception privileges Japanese descendants over other migrants, and certainly reflects the ethnic categorizations of the Japanese racial formation.⁴ It assumes that the ethnic component of the Japanese descendant's identity was stronger than the cultural elements acquired through the process of socialization within Brazilian racial formation.⁵ Even when Japanese Brazilians were to be offered low-wages in unskilled, temporary work, it was their ancestry that constituted the positive element toward their acceptance as labor migrants. This in turn was expected to guarantee the maintenance of the ethnic homogeneity in Japanese society. Shipper argues that in Japan foreign workers are "organized hierarchically," with Japanese Brazilians below the Japan-born Korean and Chinese residents and above other workers of non-Japanese descent such as Filipino, Vietnamese or Iranians.⁶

For Japanese Brazilians, Japan became a "promised land." Reality is that any "promised land" comes without hard work and significant sacrifices. In this way, they took blue-collar jobs at small and medium size factories, even when many of them were white-collar professionals in Brazil. Although it represented for them a possibility to start a different future, it also produced in many cases downward class mobility. Many Japanese

Brazilians were middle or upper-middle class in Brazil, but due to the kind of jobs that they secured in Japan, they became part of the working class.

Thousands of Japanese Brazilians migrated to Japan. The peak of the migration flow was produced between 1989 and 2001, comprising about 250,000 individuals.⁷ Since then, the influx in numbers of Japanese Brazilian migrants entering Japan has had a steady rhythm of growth. As of 2008, according to the census of the Japanese Government, there were 316,967 Japanese Brazilians registered as foreign residents. The majority of them are of Japanese descent, but non-Japanese spouses are also counted on those statistics. The census data also reveals that Japanese Brazilians represent the third largest foreign community in Japan after the Chinese and Korean populations, which account for 606,889 and 593,489 respectively.⁸

Under the current immigration law, *Nisei* (second generation) are eligible for a 3-year visa, and *Sansei* (third generation) are eligible for a 1-year visa. Both can also be renewed indefinitely.⁹ Nonetheless, 78,523 Brazilian nationals hold permanent residency (*eijuusha*) in Japan.¹⁰ Fontenelle Reis, who was Adjunct General Consul at the Brazilian Embassy in Tokyo, explains about the visa system:

According to the Municipal Autonomy Law, *nikkei* that enrolled in the foreigners register (*Gaijin Toroku*) are entitled to the same rights than [Japanese] nationals regarding the services offered by the public administration, with the exception of electoral rights. In turn, they also assume obligations, such as collection of taxes. It even applies to the Nikkei the labor legislation, such as the Labor Registration Law, the Minimum Salary Law, the Social Security and Hygiene at Work Law, and the Work Accidents Insurance Law, having no distinction, in principle, based on the nationality of the worker. In the same way, the law guarantees to the workers the right to medical assistance and prevision through the health Insurance which are applicable to workers (*Shakai Hoken* or *Kokumin Kenko Hoken*).¹¹

Japanese Brazilians are entitled to the same rights than nationals in term of services provided by the State. However their situation differs from city to city, where the local governmental offices understand their commitment to serve foreign workers in different ways. While in some cities Japanese Brazilian migrants barely receive what is offered by the state, in other cities they have even obtained the right to vote at the local level. Tsuda calls the latter “local citizenship” or the recognition that migrants are citizens of the towns where they reside and work. Kondo explains that the term *shiminken*, which is usually translated as “citizenship” has five meanings in Japan, being one of them related to the French notion of *la nouvelle citoyenneté* (the new citizenship).¹² He states that the term interpreted this way: “(...) introduces particular citizenship rights including voting rights for settled aliens. The word denizenship (*eijū shiminken*) is appropriate for some citizenship-like rights of denizen (*eijū shimin*) in Japan.”¹³

In many cases, this constitutes advancement in the recognition of the value and

interaction of migrants in the local context. Nevertheless, Tsuda agrees with other authors when remarking that this advancement does not necessarily imply their recognition as a “national citizen”, as nationality in Japan is still granted based on blood ties or through a process of naturalization.¹⁴ Furthermore, contrary to those rights granted to citizens, for migrants these kinds of rights are *temporarily given*. This is more evident in the experience of undocumented migrants in Japan. More and more, migration policies in industrialized countries such as Japan consider “undocumented” migrants as “*criminal*.” Although Japanese Brazilians are not undocumented migrants, fail to renew their visas, could render them as undocumented, and therefore, to lose all the rights and benefits that were temporarily acquired while having a visa. In Japan, if an individual overstays her/his visa without renewal, s/he is automatically considered “illegal” under the current law and, therefore, subject to deportation after completing a sentence in jail for overstaying the visa period. In other words, the status of Japanese Brazilians in Japan, as well as of any other migrants, is always temporary. Although not the case of Japanese Brazilian migrants, many NGOs in Japan has denounced deportations as potential situations for the violation of human rights, especially when the safety of a person’s life is at risk in her/his home country.¹⁵

The presence of Japanese Brazilians in Japan challenges the notion of territory-based belonging as nationality and citizenship are redefined by transnational communities in terms of elements other than blood-ties as it is the case in Japan. In analyzing this situation, Allison Brysk uses the concept of “citizenship gap.” This concept developed by her explains how the lack of citizenship rights is problematic for the new acquired status of migrants in the host society. Even citizens within the borders of their home countries are affected by this. She summarizes: “More and more legal citizens lack effective accountability for power relationships; their lives depend on distant investment decisions, organizational resolutions, religious edicts, and information campaigns.”¹⁶ Furthermore, the migration of Japanese Brazilian is inscribed in a larger process of people's movement that has increasingly changed the perceptions about citizenship, nationality, civil rights, and labor rights. Although it is easy for Japanese Brazilians to obtain visas, their situation could rapidly change if their visa expires.

III. ISSUES OF CULTURAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES

In a globalized capitalist world-system migrations are an increasingly prominent figure. They constitute movements within the world-system produced in order to satisfy the capitalist demands for cheap labor.¹⁷ The case of Japanese migrating to the Americas in the 19th and 20th century, and their descendants migrating from the Americas to Japan in the late 20th century are a clear example. The interaction of migrants in the host society is

never easy and free from frictions, in most cases scarce preparation is done in order to guarantee a positive interaction. In Japan, mass media and their representations of migrants as the “threatening other” often do not help to prevent frictions resulting from the interactions of Japanese Brazilian migrants in Japanese society. I will point to four issues that exemplify areas where those frictions are revealed.

1. Constructing the Other/s

The construction of the Other/s is related to the process of how the migrants are seen by the host society; that is, how they are labeled and perceived. Labeling is a human performance; resulting from the need to define or categorize those whom we encounter. However, labels usually are disconnected from the individuals labeled. They create stereotypes and collective fictional identities that do not take into account the lives of real people. In turn, those who are labeled may not feel represented as such. For instance, in Japan the category *nikkeijin* is used in order to represent Japanese descendants migrating from Latin America. However, the term *nikkeijin* is originated in Japanese language and culture, and many descendants from Latin America, especially those who grew up apart from Japanese immigrant communities, may not even be aware of the term’s existence. Therefore, for many Japanese descendants, *nikkeijin* becomes a “fictional identity” instead of one that is owned. In consequence, it is also unrealistic to expect Japanese descendants from Latin America behave according to a pre-defined notion of *nikkeijinness* that is exogenous to them. Furthermore, that category overlooks the strong identity formation produced in each Latin American country. Bringing together individuals from different cultures and languages --for example Brazilians and Peruvians-- not only make them not to feel represented by that category, but it also may produce tensions between both groups. Even the categories “Brazilian” or “Peruvian” are constructions that do not reflect the regional differences within a given country, which in turn complicates the perception of Japanese descendants amidst the host society.

2. Language and daily life

The language issue is mostly referred to the so-called language barrier. In January 2007, five Japanese Brazilians were arrested in Aichi Prefecture for duplicating and selling illegal DVDs with subtitles in Portuguese.¹⁸ In April 2007, two Japanese Brazilians were arrested in Nagano.¹⁹ Finally, in October 2007, four other Japanese Brazilians were arrested; this time one individual in Chiba Prefecture and three in Toyama Prefecture.²⁰ All were arrested for the same kind of crime. In all cases, the arguments to support their activities were the same: the need for Portuguese-dubbed DVDs in the market among the Portuguese-speaking community. Despite the fact that what they did constitutes an illegal action, which is a punishable crime in Japan and elsewhere, these events also demonstrate

that language issues among Japanese Brazilians play an important role in their daily lives in Japan. The DVDs at the rentals stores are destined to basically satisfy the demands of Japanese customers; that is, they are in Japanese with Japanese subtitles. Some films include English subtitles; and in few cases, films would include languages such as Korean, Chinese, Spanish, or Russian. Rarely a DVD includes Arabic, Indonesian, or Malaysian subtitles, although Japan increasingly has more and more migrants from those countries. Furthermore, when you consider other entertainments such as radio talk-shows, video games, magazines, or books, the situation is similar. Moreover, movie theaters screen films either in Japanese language or in English with Japanese subtitles. Therefore, entertainment industry benefits people who speak either Japanese or English languages; which in turn renders migrants who neither speak those languages without the possibility to enjoy many options. Leisure time then is confined to going to shopping centers, gathering at coffee-shops with friends, or dancing. In lesser cases, migrants choose religious organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church or other Protestant free churches that offer a space of cultural community, connectivity and social interaction much necessary especially when many Japanese Brazilians do not speak Japanese.

One added layer to this problem is that most of the factory jobs require for Japanese Brazilian migrants to work for long-hours periods –which also rotate between day-shifts and night-shifts every other week-. This makes it difficult for them to dedicate time to take Japanese language classes. Furthermore, many workers do not have the money necessary to afford a Japanese language course, which could cost as much as US\$ 2,000. Not being able to speak Japanese language renders the migrants either as dependants of others who do speak and can translate or as outcasts. If at many factories there are translators, sometimes other migrants who are able to speak Japanese; outside of the factory, what does a migrant do in her/his free time? Slowly, and because the Japanese Brazilian community is strong in Japan, there is an increment of radio stations and TV broadcast companies whose programs are in Portuguese. However, the DVD industry still needs to sort the issue of language subtitles if the migrants are not to rely on illegal copies. The need for leisure activities in the migrant's own language is deep and real, sometimes, making them to feel frustrated or depressed, especially in towns where the density of foreigners is low.

3. Ethnic identity

Issues of identity entitle correlated situations based on ethnicity. Racial formation in Japan is very different from that of Brazil. Japanese Brazilians are not a homogeneous community, and this can be observed in many ways. Although many of them are Japanese descendants, the high number of inter-racial marriages in Brazil adds variety to the racial pool by incorporating spouses from all ethnic backgrounds. In turn, children who are born to those families display different performances of hybridity that color the illusion of

homogeneity. Furthermore, Japanese migration to Brazil occurred through contingents arriving from 1908 to approximately 1970. Therefore, the generational gap with the first ancestor who migrated to Brazil varies from individual to individual; while some are the second generation others are the fifth or sixth generation,²¹ which has determined disparate degrees of socialization into the Brazilian society.

Upon their arrival to Japan, Japanese Brazilians found a very different situation from the one that they were commonly taught by their families. While in Brazil they took pride in being *japonês* (or Japanese), in Japan they no longer were considered as such but as *gaikokujin* (foreigners). Furthermore, Japanese society was not prepared for the variety of people represented throughout the spectrum of Japanese descendants. Besides, residential distribution in Japanese society is varied, from public housing buildings where the majority of the inhabitants are foreigners to scattered people in buildings where the majority of the residents are Japanese nationals. From the very beginning of the migration process, Japanese Brazilians have suffered discrimination in Japan either because of their lack of Japanese language skills or their perceived *Brazilianness* -- or the social and cultural behaviors that differ from the Japanese expectations (for example, louder tone of voice; public display of physical expression of emotions; etc.).

The interactions between Japanese nationals and Japanese Brazilians are different and varied, but minimal contact is the most common experience. In this sense, Japanese Brazilian migrants are sometimes separated from social interactions in both workplaces and neighborhoods. Tsuda reports that in factories, Japanese nationals and Japanese Brazilian workers eat in separate tables and wear different uniforms. The interaction between both groups it is not only minimal but also socially not encouraged.²² In daily life there are subtle negotiations of spaces in order to interact (considering that no-contact is already a form of interaction). However, in those negotiations, Japanese Brazilians are fostering spaces, communities and activities that empower them, although the result may not be more contact and communication with broader Japanese society.

4. Cultural identity

Japanese Brazilians migrants are inserted in a different position in the social ladder than where most of them have thought to be. We need to remember that the Japanese social organization is structured differently than its Brazilian counterpart, with different power relations, cultural expectations, and boundaries demarcations for daily life interactions. These demarcations condition the daily life of Japanese Brazilian migrants in ways that Japanese nationals are not, coloring their social interactions and their hopes for settlement. Comparing Western and Japanese ways of thinking in terms of boundaries, Lebra states:

If the Western way of thinking and acting presumes the structural opposition of mind and body, subject and object, transcendental and mundane, true and false, it appears that

Japanese are more guided by the social binary of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside) or *ura* (rear) and *omote* (front). The social boundary gives rise not only to insiders and outsiders, but to core and peripheral members and to marginals or liminals who are neither insiders nor outsiders or are both.²³

These social binaries that Lebra is pointing out and that produce social boundaries have molded the class structure of Japanese society across time. In fact, Japan's social class system derived from a very rigid system that was dichotomized and that was originally based on the distinction between villages, and later --in the period of modernization-- between rural dwellers *vis-à-vis* urban dwellers. This still informs the social class structure one can find in Japan nowadays. Therefore, when addressing the incorporation of Japanese Brazilians into the Japanese society, the questions should not be whether they are willing or are able to move between social classes but rather how this pre-existing structure of Japanese society with emphasis on the social interactions and demarcations made that possible or not. In other words, we should address how Japanese Brazilians migrants relate to those boundaries that delimit who is seen as an "insider" and who is considered as an "outsider." The possibility for insertion of Japanese Brazilians into Japanese society lead us back into considering the way the social structure of Japan was before the arrival of the migrants.

The discourse of Japanese uniqueness or *Nihonjinron* conveys the message that the Japanese society is mono-ethnic and mono-cultural.²⁴ This influences from the beginning any process of identity negotiation of Japanese Brazilians. Through education and mass media, the self-perception of *Japaneseness* is reinforced. Lie also states that the homogeneity of Japan contrasts with the heterogeneity of foreigners, resulting in a dichotomy where "(...) inside denotes simplicity and purity, [and] outside represents complexity and pollution."²⁵ These demarcations make it harder for Japanese Brazilian migrants to belong in the host society, as either because of ethnicity, nationality, language, or culture of socialization; they are constantly seen as "aliens," even after several generations as it is the case of Korean and Chinese born and raised in Japan.²⁶

Addressing Japanese Brazilians as "migrants" instead of as "immigrants" presupposes the assumption of transitorily status in Japan.²⁷ As "migrants" they are expected to be in Japan just for a short period of time. This is important to be highlighted because it makes the position of Japanese Brazilian workers clearer, conveying the multiple negotiations inside the world-system where their labor force is sought. It also denotes the expectations that Japanese Brazilian migrants find already in place prior to their arrival to Japan. Although passable to be negotiated, those expectations and their changes do not depend exclusively on the good will or intentions of Japanese Brazilian migrants, for example, whether to reside permanently in Japan. On the contrary, they are greatly conditioned by the will of inclusiveness/exclusiveness that is already in place amidst Japanese society, a

fact that is common to any country that becomes a receptor of migratory waves. In general, negotiating those expectations, and in consequence, the real material conditions for migrants to make a living in Japan are part of the daily and delicate balance of multicultural coexistence.

IV. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE DILEMMAS OF FINDING THE “PROMISED LAND(S)”

The negotiation of expectations is what conditions the performances of Japanese Brazilian identities while in Japan. In this sense, hybridity becomes a space of resistance, negotiation and creativity, especially for the second generation of Japanese Brazilians in Japan. One of the elements in that constant process of hybridization is that related to the contact with Japanese society, specifically with the definition of the term “Japanese.” The concern for this is whether Japanese Brazilians –who are considered *Japonês* in Brazil–, would ever be considered *Nihonjin* in Japan.

The unfolding events of the current worldwide economic crisis seem to indicate the reverse of the migration flow to Brazil. Encouraged by the Japanese government as the solution to unemployment, the new stage in the migration process of Japanese Brazilians could occlude the daily lived experiences once back to Brazil, especially the second generation born and raised in Japan.²⁸ What would be the future of those children whose primary language and cultural socialization is Japanese amidst Brazilian society? What would be the future of those children who do speak Portuguese but to whom Brazil is an unknown culture and society? Where is home and how that connects to their dream of “promised land(s)?

Korean Argentinean scholar An Youn Tae analyzes the dilemmas that migrants face once the “perplexing and disorienting” question “where is home?” is asked,²⁹ An begins by affirming that the traditional understanding of “home” denotes not only a static, fixed geographical place, but also “(...) the hermeneutical ground on which conventional notions of identity, power and space are put into question.”³⁰ By asking the question about home, the constitutive parts of one’s identity are also interrogated. The dilemma whether to identify with the homeland or with the host-land comes into perspective, problematizing the lives of migrants. An states:

As people who have no alternative but to leave their homeland for various reasons, diasporic subjects are strongly attached to their identification with space: primarily with the homeland and secondarily with the host-land. In the process of navigating between these two spaces, they often experience a sense of being lost in the space of “in-between,” for the place of origin becomes an imagined territory, an irrecoverable space, and because the reality of the host-land remains always contradictory to the nostalgic memory of home.³¹

As migrants who have displaced to a new land cannot identify “home” with one single geographical place but with multiple, An conveys a new understanding for it. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “rhizome”, he proposes that “home” could be understood as “mobile and multiple.”³² In fact this kind of understanding calls for a middle-ground where migrants and their understandings of belongingness “transition from ‘being’ to ‘becoming’.”³³ He concludes that this is:

A home in-the-becoming, a becoming-at-home, the rhizomatic home is the middle space, an integral and whole interstice where the homeless and expelled bodies find their roots, their sense of belongingness and a cognitive ground (...).³⁴

An’s contribution to the understanding of “home” and “belongingness” is radically necessary, especially since it challenges the static notions of constituency that trap and condition the existence of migrants in the host-societies as well as their dream of a “promised land.” The latter is realized through social and cultural expectations as well as through notions of assimilation and ethnic melting. The very notion of the host-society as a “promised land” also gets trapped in those assumptions. In our case of analysis, Japanese Brazilian migrants in Japan, this is most evident for the second generation, whose lives are in consequence caught in a binary situation of *either/or* assimilationist performativities. In my research I often hear the question to Japanese Brazilian children: “Are you ‘Brazilian’ or are you ‘Japanese’? Evidently, the point of view for this question is that there are clear-cut answers. In An’s analysis cited before, this is not possible at all. After living in different contexts, there is no longer possibilities to address that question by giving one single answer. The second generation is where these notions are tested, the cartography where the meaning of their lives is plot and, sometimes, underpinned. For example Sekiguchi analyzing the “ideological and symbolic context faced” by Japanese Brazilian children states that the assumption in Japanese society is that “‘*Brazilianness*’ must yield in favor of ‘Japaneseness’ –the ‘proper’ Japanese way” in order for these children to live in Japan. She concludes that there are “two separate courses” already “laid” before Japanese Brazilian children.³⁵ She asks:

Among the multiple “faces” of *Nikkei* Brazilians in Japan, which type can be accepted as “Japanese” in Japan? The answer is only those who are fully ethnic Japanese, having a “Japanese face,” a “Japanese blood line,” and a “Japanese name.” Neither a non-*Nikkei* Brazilian who decides to get Japanese citizenship to settle in Japan and changes his or her own name to a Japanese one nor a mixed-*Yonsei* born and raised in Japan and culturally indistinguishable from other Japanese national can ever be considered as being “full-fledged Japanese,” because of their non-Japanese phenotype and blood lineage. (...) Social expectation, social acceptance, and social treatment toward *Nikkei* Brazilian children are structured according to this principle.³⁶

Therefore, in her perception, only those who are “full-fledged Japanese” have a possibility to be assimilated into Japanese society, if they “assimilate into becoming ‘normal Japanese’, which she sees as a “strong” “internal/external psychological pressure.” These children facing assimilation “soon choose to become ‘invisible’ by using a Japanese full name so that they will not stand out as ‘I-am-from-Brazil’.”³⁷

On the contrary, those who are of “mixed” ancestry, can be assimilated if they become a “a model or a celebrity” with a “face not too exotic but cute enough with some Japanese features, [which] is now in high demand by the Japanese advertising industry and entertainment media” or, they simply will “resist” “Japanese schooling” and “lead” “to delinquent behavior.” Therefore, she concludes about these two paths as being common problems to all minorities in Japan. She states:

The fundamental issue is not differences in language and culture per se, but the symbolic status conferred on the minority by mainstream Japanese, a matter embedded in the history and the structure of Japanese society.³⁸

This statement cannot be clearer than in the experiences of the second generation of Japanese Brazilians in Japan, who face constant challenges especially through their interactions at schools. Mostly, education is in Japanese because very few schools can provide for a Portuguese-speaking tutor. The result is painful, either because many migrants’ children cannot communicate or suffer bullying from their classmates. In many cases, these children are unable to defend themselves because they do not understand the verbal aggression, except when it is accompanied by physical violence. An NGO states:

Close cooperation between the schools and the society is essential to realize harmonious multiethnic and multicultural coexistence by placing migrants’ children in right places of their school and society. First of all, prejudice toward the children has to be eliminated, and those discriminating have to be not only advised to stop it but also clearly reminded that it is a crime punishable by law.³⁹

In spite of the good intentions of this NGO, much needs to be done in Japanese society to achieve this level of multiculturalism. Thus, Japanese Brazilians are separated (sometimes alienated) in social environments because of several issues. This shows how rigidly the construction of cultural identity is defined within Japanese society. Culture and language are significant factors in identity negotiations and are usually elements where discrimination against Japanese Brazilians in Japan can be observed. Those parents, who have chosen to send their children to Japanese schools, now face the situation that their children, raised exclusively in Japanese, cannot communicate with them. They may understand when the parents speak Portuguese, but are unable to respond. On the contrary, those parents who have chosen to send their children to Brazilian schools have contributed to their alienation as they cannot communicate in Japanese, thus enhancing their situation

as “eternal outsiders” in the host society. Back to Brazil, these children may be able to communicate in Portuguese, but Brazilian society may also feel foreign for them.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the situations that Japanese Brazilians have experienced in Japan for the last two decades. It has concentrated in issues related to culture, language, ethnicity, and nationality in order to show the many aspects that have and continue to influence their lives. As with any other transnational community, Japanese Brazilians have experienced difficult times and made many sacrifices in order to live up to their dreams. They struggle daily in order to find meaning while striving for better their lives. Given the current stage of migration, the issues analyzed in this article could be reproduced in the second generation once in Brazil. How to feel at “home” when any place and all places are “home”? The “promised land” may then not be one space but multiple, a sign of hope to guide individuals in situation of displacement to feel “at home” while on the move. Requiring Japanese Brazilians to sort imposed *either/or* choices as in the question “Are you Japanese or Brazilian?” is a burden that de-centers and alienates bi-racial/bi-cultural children. It may be that “the promised land” is not so much a geographical place, but a state, an attitude and a sense of hope in the face of migration and constant displacement.

¹ Bible references are taken from *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

² The “American dream” is the notion of a better life in freedom and prosperity for all individuals in the United States. It entitles a sense of national identity, in which education, social mobility and economic well-being play an important role. For its religious connection to Christianity, see Cullen, Jim, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.16-17. See also Benne, Robert and Philip Hefner, *Defining America: A Christian Critique of the American Dream* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1974).

³ Nojima, Toshihiko, “Susumetai nikkeijin no tokubetsu ukeire” (Toward the Special Admission of the Nikkeijin), *Gekkan Jiyu Minshu* (November 1989), pp. 98-99; translated and quoted by Yamanaka, Keiko, “Return Migration of Japanese-Brazilians to Japan: The *Nikkeijin* as Ethnic Minority and Political Construct,” *Diaspora*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1996), p.76. Italics mine.

⁴ Yoshino, Kosaku, “The Discourse on Blood and Racial Identity in Contemporary Japan,” in Dikötter, Frank (ed.), *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), pp. 199-211.

⁵ See Daniel, G. Reginald, *Race and Multiraciality in Brazil and the United States: Converging Paths?* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 27-28. See also Adachi, Nobuko. “Japonês: A Marker of Social Class or a Key Term in the Discourse of Race?,” *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 136, Vol. 31, No. 3 (May 2004), p. 49.

⁶ Shipper, Apichai W., “The Political Construction of Foreign Workers in Japan,” *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2002), pp. 41-42.

⁷ Naoto Higuchi and Kiyoto Tanno, “What’s Driving Brazil-Japan Migration? The Making and Remaking of the Brazilian Niche in Japan,” in *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, No. 12 (2003), p. 34.

- Observing the annual statistics of the Ministry of Justice of Japan reveals that while in 1988 there were only 4,159 Brazilian nationals registered in Japan, by 1989 that number escalated to 14,528. In 1990, when the reform of the immigration law was effective, that number sky-rocketed to 54,429. By 1991, Brazilian residents in Japan doubled to 119,333. Since then, the influx of migrants became steady. See Yamanaka, Keiko, "Feminization of Japanese Brazilian Labor Migration to Japan," in Lesser, Jeffrey (ed.), *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese Brazilians and Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 180. Hereinafter cited as "Feminization of Japanese Brazilian Labor..."
- ⁸ Ministry of Justice of Japan (Japan Immigration Association), *Zairyuu gaikokujin toukei* (Statistics of Foreign Residents [in Japan]), 2007.
- ⁹ Reis, Maria Edileuza Fontenelle, *Brasileiros no Japão: O elo humano das relações bilaterais*, (São Paulo: Kaleidus-Primus, 2001), p. 68.
- ¹⁰ See "Mais brasileiros com visto permanente no Japão", *Jornal Tudo Bem* (Tokyo), 27 Jan. 2008. [Accessed: 18 February 2008] <<http://gambare.uol.com.br/2008/01/27/mais-brasileiros-com-visto-permanente-no-japao/>>. The data for that newspaper article comes from statistics for the year 2006 issued by the Department of Immigration, Ministry of Justice of Japan.
- ¹¹ Reis, p. 69.
- ¹² See Kondo, Atsushi, "Citizenship Rights for Aliens in Japan," in *Citizenship in a Global World: Comparing Citizenship Rights for Aliens* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), p. 11.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Tsuda, Takeyuki, "Local Citizenship and Foreign Workers in Japan," Paper presented at the Conference on *Migration and Integration: Japan in a Comparative Perspective* (Tokyo, October 24, 2007). For a similar analysis about this situation among the Japanese Peruvian population, see Méndez Vázquez, Marcela I., "South American *Nikkeijin* Acquisition of Local Citizenship: The Case of the Japanese-Peruvian Association—AJAPE," in Mita, Chiyoko (et al.) (eds.), *Sociedade japonesa e migrantes brasileiros: Novos caminhos na formação de uma rede de pesquisadores* (Tokyo: Center for Lusophone Studies / Sophia University, 2008), pp. 49-59.
- ¹⁵ See Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, *Living Together with Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Japan: An NGO Policy Proposal* (Tokyo: SMJ, 2007), pp. 98-103; Hereinafter referred as "SMJ".
- ¹⁶ Brysk, Alison, "Introduction: Transnational Threats and Opportunities," in *Globalization and Human Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 11.
- ¹⁷ The term *world-system* is taken from the work of Immanuel Wallerstein. According to him, the unit of social science analysis is neither the "state" nor the "nation" but the whole world, since the whole world constitutes a single capitalist economy where even the socialist/communist countries play a role within the capitalist economic dynamics. The roots of the modern world-system traced back to the 15th century and the beginning of colonialist expansionism of Spain and Portugal, follow centuries later by England and France. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), xi.
- ¹⁸ See "Dono de locadora de vídeo é detido em Aichi," *International Press* (Tokyo), 18 Jan. 2007.
- ¹⁹ See "Brasileiros são indiciados por pirataria em Nagano," *International Press* (Tokyo), 22 Ap. 22 2007.
- ²⁰ See "Mais um brasileiro preso no Japão por pirataria," *International Press* (Tokyo), 14 Oct. 2007. See also "Três brasileiros detidos por pirataria no Japão," *International Press* (Tokyo), 17 Oct. 2007.
- ²¹ Harumi, Paula. "100 anos depois... O primeiro rokussei" (After 100 Years... The First [Child of the] Sixth Generation), *Made in Japan* 11, No. 127 (April 2008), pp. 34-41.
- ²² Tsuda, Takeyuki, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Return Migration in Transnational Perspective*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 16.
- ²³ Lebra, Takie Sugiyama, "Introduction," in *Japanese Social Organization* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), p. 5.

- ²⁴ See Yoshino, Kosaku, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 2.
- ²⁵ Lie, John, "The Discourse of Japaneseness," in Douglas, Mike and Glenda S. Roberts (eds.), *Japan and Global Migration: Foreign Workers and the Advent of a Multicultural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), p. 83.
- ²⁶ On the topic see Murphy-Shigematsu, Stephen, "Identities of Multiethnic People in Japan," in Douglas, Mike and Glenda S. Roberts (eds.), *Japan and Global Migration: Foreign Workers and the Advent of a Multicultural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), pp. 196-216.
- ²⁷ This is a subtle distinction. In general terms, "migrant" conveys a temporary state of displacement, usually applied to seasonal workers, while "immigrant" is usually applied to those individuals who migrate with the intention of reside permanently in the new country.
- ²⁸ See Debito, Arudou, "'Golden Parachutes' Mark Failure of Race-Based Policy," *The Japan Times* (Tokyo), 7 Ap. 2009.
- ²⁹ An, Youn Tae, "No Longer Strangers and Aliens... A Deleuzian Reading of Home as a Multiple, Fluid, and Peripatetic Space". Paper presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, IL., November 3, 2008, p. 1.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
- ³⁵ Sekiguchi, Tomoko, "Nikkei Brazilians in Japan: The Ideology and Symbolic Context Faced by Children of this New Ethnic Minority," in Donahue, Ray T. (ed.), *Exploring Japaneseness: On Japanese Enactments of Culture and Consciousness* (Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing, 2002), p. 207.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 209.
- ³⁹ SMJ, p. 70.